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Muerto, 1982; Wedding Obi

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Muerto, 1982

When you're packing, fixing to leave,
the junk drawer gets you. How can you say goodbye
to the chipped quartzite geode Megan sent you
before she was sent to the Menninger Clinic—
14-year-old Megan, little sister of your friend,
who slept beneath the acacia tree
where the Virgin perched in its feathery branches?
Or the rusty sign stamped *AGRICULTURE*
you and David stole
from the tackroom of Littlejohn's stables
one hot glowworm July
when he bit his wrist to keep from crying out
and came in your mouth for the first time ever?
Not to mention the matchbooks
from endless roadside restaurants,
a greasy tattered recipe card for crawfish
etouffee. And the glossy nighttime postcard
in its aqua Walmart frame,
the arc of lights spelling *CAVE LAND MOTEL*
all lit up like a Christmas tree
above *CHECK OUR PRICES DON'T BE MIS-LED*,
where your heel caught in the shag
of the honeymoon suite carpet
nine years and seven months ago exactly
and you lurched into Jeffrey's arms
suddenly terrified, wearing your peach
ruffled babydolls, three miles east of Mammoth—
how can you leave this card
to the abuse and careless fingerings
of strangers? All the flotsam of your past,
junked in a kitchen drawer
in this narrow musty avocado townhouse
where you've tried to pretend
you're not desolate, not in the wrong marriage:

pack it in boxes and bags, it wants you,
everything you've ever done wants you to caress it,
and the deadweight lump of lead embossed with a pug dog
that you bought for a dollar
one rainy lonesome day on a back street in Virginia,
this relic wants you too. And the *muerto*, better take that,
better cherish the skeleton bride and groom
posed in their wooden matchbox,
in the background the crude outlines
of a tiny white cathedral, better wrap the *muerto*
and carry it to the yellow convertible
carefully, as if it were a robin's egg,
because if you are lucky
the man whose name's your secret,
the man who dreamed he could fly
the first time you slept beside him
and who waits for you now in the convertible,
tipping his face to the sun, as you shut the door
on the empty house
and enter the blinding April daylight,
if you are luckier than lucky
on some far, unimaginable afternoon or morning

this man will close your eyes down—

Wedding *Obi*

I think of Kyoto in 1955,
the market of shifting silks, that rainy Easter after war,
when we walked along the alley where the fingernail weaver
crouched above his loom and wove the wedding *obi*'s
crysanthemums and cranes,

cherry blossoms, swirling water, pine tufts with crooked branches,
gold
and crimson leaves

and the man whom my mother called my father
gazed at her, leaning slightly over her as she bent to touch the *obi*,
she in her soft black coat, he so dignified and stiff
in his Army uniform,
stranger newly back from three years' war.

I knew for certain that man was not my father.
My mother slept with him, she wore his pearls and garnets,
but I became convinced, one night on the ship
as I tossed in my bunk
on the voyage to Japan,
we were being led into treachery, spies had taken my father, he was
dying in chains
in a quonset hut outside Seoul.

Memory was shifting, beautiful, uncertain,
like the alley where silk organza
shimmered and floated like wings
of every bird in paradise-
viridian, copper,
cobalt,
pink like the tender, silken conch,

pale daffodil, silver, vermilion—
My father hid his face
in that far-off land of quonset huts and spies,

and even she kept her secrets. I tagged along till my legs burned
and cramped with growing pains, but my mother never told me
how she knew this was the man she should lie down with.
For her he had not changed
but I was a child when he went away.
She just touched the wedding *obi*, lifting a corner
a little toward me, and said, *See the pattern of seasons?*
That's how the obi weaver weaves eternity for marriage.